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ABSTRACT

The "information explosion" in the field of population has created a need for proper identification, systematization, dissemination, and utilization of population information. To help meet these needs in the Asian and Pacific regions, the Clearinghouse and Information Section of the Population Division of ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) is developing a variety of research and action programs. The programs provide information via two regional networks: The Population Correspondents Network and the Population Documentation Centre/Library Network. The Population Correspondents Network is made up of key personnel engaged in the population field who provide ESCAP with up-to-date information about population activities in their organizations and countries. Other ESCAP activities include a bibliographic information exchange, compilation of a regional population and family planning thesaurus, training and consultation, development of microform services, translation services, and distribution of publications of current interest. (JY)

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE/EAST-WEST CENTER, EAST-WEST COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE, WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF POPULATION DIVISION, ESCAP.

Workshop on Systems Interconnexions: Standardization, Uniformity and Co-ordination in Population/Family Planning Information Network

12-16 April 1976
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

THE ESCAP POPULATION INFORMATION NETWORK

Note by the ESCAP Secretariat

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A. INTRODUCTION

The "information explosion" in the field of population has created a need for proper identification, systematization, dissemination and utilization of population information. To help meet these requirements in the ESCAP region, the Clearing-house and Information Section of the Population Division is developing a variety of research and action programmes. Basically, the Clearing-house functions as an information centre, identifying and analysing regional trends.

Working with Governments at their request, ESCAP determines specific needs of users in member countries. It serves as an active clearing-house of population materials for the region. Information that may be useful to decision-makers, researchers and educators is systematically acquired, processed, abstracted and then disseminated in a variety of forms to different audiences. Information is shared through publications from the Population Division in the Asian Population Studies Series and Country Monograph Series and through three regular publications, the quarterly Asian Population Programme News, the monthly four-page mimeographed Population Headliners and ADOPT, a mimeographed monthly documentation publication designed to support the ESCAP Population Library Documentation Centre Network. Selected population publications from other United Nations family members (United Nations Headquarters, UNFPA, FAO, ILO, UNESCO, etc.), United Nations Commissions and member Governments are also distributed with the assistance of a selective computerized mailing list. These

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activities take place within the context of two regional networks, the Population Correspondents Network and the Population Documentation Centre/Library Network, developed by ESCAP to make the sharing of population information a dynamic process, flexible enough to meet changing needs and new demands. Finally, where language is a barrier to communication, ESCAP is promoting national translation programmes and exploring the possibility of using machine translation.

B. THE ESCAP POPULATION CORRESPONDENTS NETWORK

1. Formation and composition

The development of the ESCAP Correspondents Network took several years. The initial stage involved the identification of key personnel.[1/] This was followed by a survey which located key institutions and personnel engaged in the population field.[2/] At the request of ESCAP, the identified institutions appointed academic population correspondents and alternates to report on population-related research and training activities. ESCAP also requested member Governments to nominate correspondents. A third category of correspondents comprises those of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) generally oriented towards family planning. In March 1976, the network consisted of 296 ESCAP population correspondents and 85 alternate correspondents from 29 countries. Of the total number of 381 correspondents, 69(9) were government correspondents, 209(74) were academic correspondents and 18(2) were from non-governmental organizations.[3/]

/ Following

1/ Directory of Key Personnel and Periodicals in the Field of Population in the ESCAP Region (E/CN.11/898), 1970.

2/ Research, Teaching and Training in Demography - A Directory of Institutions in the ESCAP Region, and Supplements Nos. 1, 2 and 3, Asian Population Series No. 8 (E/CN.11/1007), 1971.

3/ The numbers of alternate correspondents are indicated in parentheses.

Following up earlier work, a new survey was conducted in February 1976 to determine the special subject interests of all correspondents and alternates and to provide subject interest profiles which could be used to tailor information to the needs of the users. Preliminary returns indicated interest (in order of priority) in family planning, migration, fertility, mortality, population policy, manpower and employment, population and development, and population trends.

2. The role of correspondents

The correspondents network with its three categories of correspondents provides a means to collect and disseminate information easily, regularly and quickly and makes possible fast sharing and maximum utilization of information. Members of this network provide ESCAP with up-to-date information about population activities in their organizations and countries. This information is then used by ESCAP. Some items are carried in Population Headliners and Asian Population Programme News. Occasionally, correspondents are asked to provide information on particular subjects, for example, a request for references on migration brought responses from correspondents in many countries. Correspondents also provide ESCAP with population materials such as publications from their organizations, country reports, research reports, etc., and, in turn, they sometimes serve as distribution points for materials sent by ESCAP. Through this network, ESCAP is made aware of activities in the member States and is better able to share relevant information with them.

3. The role of ESCAP

Since the network of correspondents is a two-way information system, ESCAP regularly sends all Population Division publications and selected population materials from other organizations to correspondents. Priority attention is given to requests for information or materials from correspondents. ESCAP staff on country missions also visit correspondents. Through these various means, the correspondents network makes the ESCAP population information system a dynamic one where communication is systematic and interaction between knowledge and practice encouraged.

Thus, the role of ESCAP is to serve as the focal point for population information and be the catalytic agent linking together all the institutions in the network, making information-sharing a co-operative activity.4/

4. Further developments

In the process of developing this network, it became clear to ESCAP that the effectiveness of a regional information centre would be hampered by inefficient information sharing and co-ordination at the country level. The regional centre will only be as strong as its weakest national link. To strengthen the regional centre, measures were needed to co-ordinate information systems and improve communication at the national level. As an initial step towards achieving these objectives, ESCAP organized national workshops of population correspondents in Indonesia (1973), Thailand (1973),

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4/ Further details on the ESCAP population correspondents network can be obtained from the article, "The challenge to the network of population correspondents of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific" (UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries, vol. XXIX, No. 1, January-February 1975)

the Republic of Korea (1974) and Pakistan (1974) enabling participants to examine communication problems between information producers (researchers) and consumers (administrators and decision-makers). From these workshops, various action programmes have resulted.

In the Republic of Korea, a national Clearing-house was established in 1974. In Indonesia, the National Family Planning Co-ordinating Board (BKKBN) is developing its national population information network. Pakistan is taking steps to expand its population information capability. Thailand is strengthening its documentation and network skills through actual experience and training.

ESCAP hopes, ultimately, that all population information in a country can be channelled through correspondents to a central national information system, which can furnish the information to regional population information centres such as the Clearing-house and Information Section of the ESCAP Population Divi ion. In keeping with the network concept, such centres would function as focal points as well as link countries to one another in a wider regional information network.

C. THE ESCAP POPULATION LIBRARY/DOCUMENTATION CENTRE NETWORK

The ESCAP Population Library/Documentation Centre Network came into being following recommendation No. 9 of the Working Meeting on Asian Resources for a Population Library Information Network held at Bangkok from 13-15 September 1973 which stated that "a regional association of documentation centres should be

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established in the Population Division of the ESCAP Secretariat". At present, the ESCAP Population Division through its Population Library Network maintains regular contact with over 100 population libraries in the region. It serves as a regional focal point in an effort to encourage the systematic collection and dissemination of information.

ACTIVITIES

1. Bibliographic information exchange

The ESCAP Population Division Reference Centre acts as the information channeller for the network. In its role as the central resource base it issues a listing of current population-related materials of special relevance to the ESCAP region that are received and processed in the Division. The name of the monthly document is ADOPT: Asian and Worldwide Documents on Population Topics.

To guide readers, the bibliographic citation of each document listed is followed by "descriptors" or key words that represent an in-depth analysis of the subject covered. An abstract or a brief summary of the content follows. The application of descriptors and the brief synopsis are designed to make the list a useful tool for the reader (decision-maker, researcher, librarian) to scan and select items of interest quickly and easily. Information is also supplied on the sources where the listed publications can be obtained.

ADOPT is distributed free of charge to population libraries, documentation centres and professionals, primarily within the ESCAP geographic region.

2. Compilation of a regional population and family planning thesaurus

The ESCAP Population Division reviewed major thesauri in the population/family planning field and other related subjects in order to build an appropriate descriptor's list to suit the particular nature of its collection.

The criteria used in selection of the terms were:

(a) Acquire the necessary terms to describe fully the subjects covered by the materials selected for the collection;

(b) Choose standardized terms that are accepted generally by other thesauri;

(c) Assign new terms to accommodate new concepts and the particular approach required for United Nations activities in the population fields;

(d) Maintain or identify, wherever possible, terms that are widely understood and used in literature published in Asia; and

(e) Add new terms to identify thinking and conditions which are unique to the Asian region.

The purpose of establishing the descriptor list was to facilitate the retrieval function of population information in building up a resource base to serve a regional population information library network. It is hoped that this compilation will contribute to the regional and world-wide project on a population information retrieval system formally being undertaken for the United Nations by the Committee for International Co-ordination of National Research in Demography (CICRED) and others.

The first draft of the ESCAP descriptor list was completed in June 1975. It is constantly being updated as more material comes in and new developments occur in the field. The second draft, with cross references and a hierarchical display to facilitate its use, is now under preparation. It is scheduled for completion in mid-1976. Copies of the first draft have been sent to:

(i) International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), London.

(ii) East-West Communication Institution, East-West Center, Hawaii, U.S.A.

(iii) Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina, U.S.A.

(iv) United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) Library, New York, U.S.A.

(v) Reference Centre, Population Division, United Nations, New York, U.S.A.

(vi) Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris.

(vii) Ford Foundation Regional Office, Bangkok, Thailand.

(viii) UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia, Bangkok, Thailand.

3. Training and consultation

It was agreed at the 1973 Working Meeting on Asian Resources for a Population Library Information Network that "the training of librarians is an essential factor in the efficient functioning of

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the proposed network at all levels and assistance should be given for that purpose" (see page 12 of the report). The ESCAP Population Division has set up training programmes for population librarians at the national level on an ad hoc basis. More than 150 individuals from various countries in the region have been trained in the field of documentation-processing work, literature search and identification of resources in population areas. Several more from India, Bangladesh and Thailand are already scheduled for training in 1976. With the extra space made available to the Division on moving into the new United Nations headquarters building, a separate training room is planned to accommodate more trainees for expanded programmes in the future.

The initial phase in establishing the population library/documentation centre information network among the countries of the ESCAP region has focused on the national level. The ESCAP Population Division, upon request, has provided advisory and technical assistance to several countries to set up or strengthen population libraries and documentation centres. Principal efforts thus far have been in Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan. Requests for technical assistance have been received this year from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

4. Development of microform service

The microform capability of the ESCAP Population Division has increased considerably through the acquisition of a reader-printer (Kodak Recordak Motormatic Reader with printing capacity). This integrated unit is capable of reading both microfilm and microfiche.

The print component produces hard copy which may be used on an electric stencil-cutting machine to make mimeograph stencils.

The Division is now in the process of developing a microform collection of population material. At present, for exchange purposes, the Population Division can supply at cost,[5/] plus postage, microfiche copies of its own published documents.

5. Translation

The need to exchange population information among countries in the region through the medium of local language and the problems arising from language barriers is becoming more apparent as more countries begin publishing in their national languages. In its effort to overcome these barriers and ensure the flow of population information, the ESCAP Population Division convened an Expert Working Group on the Translation of Population Materials in December 1975. The Group's consensus was in support of expanded programmes in the translation field. The feasibility of establishing national translation programmes in countries of the ESCAP region was discussed in detail. Pilot projects were recommended. The translation programme as it develops will help implement network activities. In turn, it will require support at the national level in the form of translating skills and funds for production of documents.

6. Distribution of publications of current interest

To strengthen the resource materials collection of its network members, the Division distributes, from time to time, publications

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5/ The cost for making microfiche is $US1.00 per original (master copy) and $.30 per copy (microfiche duplicate). Each fiche can accommodate up to 60 pages of printed material.

of current interest acquired from various population institutions all over the world. It also sends out surplus copies on request. Since its first list of duplicate materials was sent out in January 1976, the Division has supplied over 400 publications to 21 member libraries in 11 countries.

D. CONCLUSION

These two regional networks developed by the ESCAP Population Division are designed to overcome many of the current problems and inadequacies encountered in the field of information exchange. Effective utilization of existing information and materials is the primary target. Within the framework of the population information network, developing patterns of information exchange can be formalized and made more efficient and effective. Perhaps the ESCAP networks' most important contribution will be the increased awareness and utilization of existing resources at a period when funding is a problem.

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